

09/30/21 Thursday

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DPRK Says It's Test-Fired a New Surface-to-Air Missile With 'Major New Technology'
By - Morgan Artyukhina

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) test-fired a new surface-to-air missile on Thursday, state media reported on Friday. It is the second new weapon the socialist state has announced this week, after earlier revealing a new hypersonic glide vehicle test.

"The Academy of Defense Science of the DPRK test-fired a newly-developed anti-air missile on September 30. The test fire was aimed at confirming the general combat function of the missile and practical ability of the launching pad, radar and combat commanding vehicle," Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) report on Friday morning.

"The Academy of Defense Science announced that remarkable combat function of the latest anti-air missile was confirmed, which drastically increased the fast response, guiding accuracy and target hitting distance of the missile control system by introducing major new technology including the twin rudder controlling technique and double impulse flight mortar," KCNA said, adding that "the recent test-firing is of great practical significance in the prospective research and development of different kinds of anti-air missile system."

The DPRK has an [extensive array](#) of air defense systems designed to fend off bombardment by US and South Korean air forces in the event of a war. During the 1950-53 Korean War, US strategic bombers targeted every major city, killing up to 20% of the country's population, [according to US Air Force Gen. Curtis LeMay](#), who was head of the Strategic Air Command during the war.

Among its most effective weapons is the KN-06, an indigenously developed air defense system broadly analogous to Russia's S-300P, including a phased array radar and missile guidance system, but with a range of up to 160 miles. However, the DPRK also has a number of older Soviet-era systems bought from the USSR, many of which have likely been upgraded.

Earlier this week, [KCNA also revealed](#) that what had been believed to be a test of a short-range missile was actually the inaugural flight of a new hypersonic glide vehicle. Development of a Mach 5 missile, which is capable of evading almost every known air defense and tracking system, is something only the US, China, and Russia have accomplished.

Speaking before the United Nations General Assembly [just moments after](#) the hypersonic test, the DPRK's ambassador to the UN, Kim Sung, defended the country's right to self-defense and to test new weapons, given the hostile disposition of other nations.

"The possible outbreak of a new war on the Korean Peninsula is contained not because of the US' mercy on the DPRK," Kim said. "It is because our state is a growing reliable deterrent that can control the hostile forces in the attempts of a military invasion."

The 1950-53 war only ended in a ceasefire and the establishment of a demilitarized zone separating the two Koreas. The US has stationed 28,000 troops in South Korea and conducts regular military drills with the South, which rehearse strikes on the North. The Koreans came

close to signing an end-of-war declaration amid a rapprochement in 2018, but talks fell apart after the US refused to lower economic sanctions without seeing proof the DPRK had irreversibly dismantled its nuclear weapons program.

DPRK leader Kim Jong Un [said on Thursday](#) he was willing to restore communication via the inter-Korean hotline in October. Days earlier, Kim Yo Jong, Deputy Department Director of the Publicity and Information Department of the Workers' Party of Korea and Kim's sister, said the [North remains open](#) to an inter-Korean summit, but only if mutual "respect" and "impartiality" are guaranteed and the South drops its double-standards.

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US State Dept-Backed Study Claims BRI Partners Have \$385 Billion in Unreported Debt to Chinese Banks

By - Morgan Artyukhina

A new study by a research group backed by the US State Department claims to have found hundreds of billions in so-called "hidden" debt to Chinese banks in low and middle-income countries associated with Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) infrastructure projects. The researchers say it sheds light on how the US can compete with China.

"Many foreign leaders who were initially eager to jump on the BRI bandwagon are now suspending or cancelling Chinese infrastructure projects because of debt sustainability concerns," Brad Parks, executive director of AidData at the College of William and Mary and one of the study's authors, told [AFP on Wednesday](#).

"What we're seeing right now with the Belt and Road Initiative is buyers' remorse," he added. Titled "Banking on the Belt and Road," [the report examined](#) 13,427 infrastructure projects across 165 countries over an 18-year period beginning in 2000. It claims to have found that China's overseas development finance programs are actually much larger than western financial institutions had previously believed, and says their obscurity is a warning to nations considering deals with Beijing.

According to the report, before the BRI was launched in 2013, the majority of China's overseas lending was performed by sovereign borrowers, or central government financial institutions; this shifted under BRI and now, nearly 70% of China's overseas lending is being handled by state-owned companies, state-owned banks, special purpose vehicles, joint ventures, and private sector institutions.

"These debts are systematically underreported to the World Bank's Debtor Reporting System (DRS) because, in many cases, central government institutions in LMICs are not the primary borrowers responsible for repayment," the report's executive summary states. "We estimate that the average government is underreporting its actual and potential repayment obligations to China by an amount that is equivalent to 5.8% of its GDP. Collectively, these underreported debts are worth approximately \$385 billion."

The report implies its numbers reflect poorly on China, but it's not clear why that would be the case. As a percentage of its gross domestic product (GDP), 5.8% is not especially large when it

comes to debts. Moreover, Western financial institutions often extend even larger loans to poor nations.

For example, in June, the International Monetary Fund ([IMF](#)) gave [Sudan](#) a \$2.5 billion loan; with just a \$30.5 billion GDP, that loan by itself is 8.1% of Sudan's GDP. Chad, with a GDP of \$11.31 billion, [owes \\$1 billion](#) to Anglo-Swiss conglomerate Glencore alone - 8.8% of its GDP - on top of numerous IMF loans.

Loans from the IMF aren't simply money that must be repaid with interest, though: they come with stiff requirements for financial restructuring according to what the bank considers to support sustainable economic growth - that is, massive privatization schemes and pro-business reforms that destroy nation's financial sovereignty and leave them forever dependent upon the IMF and Western international conglomerates. Chinese lenders make no such demands.

Recent crises in [Zambia](#), [Tunisia](#) and [Mozambique](#) can similarly attest to the dangers of an IMF loan.

A closer look at AidData's backers reveals why it has taken such a dim view on the situation.

[According to its website](#), financial donors include the World Bank; the Hewlett Foundation, established by Hewlett-Packard cofounder William Redington Hewlett; the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, established by the Microsoft founder and his wife; and the Ford Foundation, established by Ford Motor Company founder and Nazi sympathizer Henry Ford and his son Edsel.

Other financial backers include the China Power Project at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a hawkish Washington think tank; the US Agency for International Development (USAID), a US government agency that operates under the purview of the US Department of State and the White House National Security Council; and the Millennium Challenge Corporation, a subsidiary of USAID and the State Department.

In other words, a host of groups whose work is dedicated to preserving American domination of the globe and smearing China at every opportunity. It's no surprise that the report repeatedly promotes the [Build Back Better World](#) (B3W) program announced by the Group of Seven in June as a way to undercut China's BRI.

"B3W is going to increase choice in the infrastructure financing market, which could lead to some high-profile BRI defections," [Parks told Reuters](#).

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Anarchy in the US? What Would've Happened if the US Government Had Shut Down
By - Morgan Artyukhina

The US Congress narrowly avoided a shutdown of the federal government on Thursday by passing a temporary funding bill. But what if they hadn't? Was the US on the verge of anarchy? Not quite. Here's a few things that would - and would not - have happened if the US ran out of money.

So, What Happened?

The US federal government was about to run out of money appropriated to fund it. According to the US Constitution, only Congress has the power to create funding for federal agencies. Democrats tried to [leverage the situation](#) to get Republicans to agree to raise the debt ceiling, but the gamble failed.

The federal government now has enough money to continue paying its bills until December 3.

It's Not Everything, But It's A Lot.

If the spending bill hadn't been passed, it wouldn't have meant a universal halt of all federal government functions.

Federal agencies would begin locking their doors on Friday, and would furlough many of their employees deemed nonessential, meaning they wouldn't get fired, but they would neither do work nor be paid. Each federal agency and department has its own shutdown plans, outlining who stays and who gets furloughed.

In all, about 2.1 million civilian federal employees would likely get sent home without checks for the duration of the crisis.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we've become accustomed to "essential workers" meaning something different. But in this case, it would include fire and rescue workers, police officers, military service members, air traffic controllers, Transportation Security Administration employees, and postal workers. All would [work without pay](#), but would receive back pay for the hours worked once the government gets new funding.

However, many other functions we might consider essential, such as safety inspections, would likely cease. [According to the Committee](#) for a Responsible Federal Budget, other functions that would stop include payment of Medicare checks and Supplemental Assistance for Needy Persons (SNAP) payments, operation of the national parks, and many of the functions of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and the National Institutes for Health (NIH).

Immigration court proceedings, passport applications, the processing of home or small business loans by government financiers, and road repairs would all stop.

What About COVID-19?

"The worst time in the world we want to shut down the government is in the middle of a pandemic where we have 140,000 people a day getting infected and 2,000 people a day dying," Dr. Anthony Fauci, US President Joe Biden's chief medical adviser and chief of the NIH's National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, [told The Washington Post](#) earlier this month.

The Department of Health and Human Services, which oversees the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and the NIH, has [said it would furlough](#) about 43% of its employees. This would create delays, especially in vaccine distribution, testing, and certification processes, but they wouldn't cease.

However, we really don't know how a shutdown would affect government efforts to fight the pandemic, as a shutdown has never happened during one before.

Has It Ever Happened Before?

Yes! The federal government has lacked appropriated funds to continue functioning in years that include 1995, 2013, 2018, and 2019, the last and longest of which lasted for 35 days. It only ended once hundreds of air traffic controllers [mounted an ersatz strike](#) by calling in sick for days on end, forcing then-US President Donald Trump to relent.

So We Could Find Ourselves Back Here in 2 Months?

Yes.

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Digital Vibes Report Reveals Corruption Behind South African Health Ministry's COVID-19 Media Deal
By - Morgan Artyukhina

After months of pressure, the administration of South African President Cyril Ramaphosa has released the results of a government probe into a contract for a COVID-19 media campaign with Digital Vibes, revealing extensive corruption behind the awarding of the deal.

When the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in early 2020, private firm Digital Vibes was already handling the South African National Department of Health's (NDoH) National Health Insurance (NHI) communication campaign. However, the firm was soon tapped to head up government communications on COVID-19, as well.

According to a [report released on](#) Wednesday, there was extensive corruption underpinning the deal, and former Health Minister Zweli Mkhize got extensive kickbacks for granting the contract to his friends.

The report was given to Ramaphosa by the Special Investigating Unit (SIU) in July, but delayed publication until all third parties had been given a chance to object to its publication, his office [said on Twitter](#).

According to the report, "during the period 29 January 2020 and February 2021, the National Department of Health (NDoH) had paid a total amount of approximately R150 million [\$9.9 million] to Digital Vibes, which was deemed to be irregular expenditure; and that the NDoH had incurred fruitless and wasteful expenditure of at least approximately R37 million [\$2.5 million] in respect of payments made to Digital Vibes (sic)."

The report notes that the owners of Digital Vibes, Tahera Mather and Naadhira Mitha, are "close associates" of Mkhize. Indeed, Mather was Mkhize's strategic communications adviser in 2019, [according to News24](#).

"Mather and Mitha committed fraud in that they held out to the NDoH that Digital Vibes was tendering for the NHI media campaign contract, whereas in fact, Ms. Mather and Ms. Mitha used Digital Vibes as a front in order to hide ... that they were tendering for the contract and 'disguised' this due to the fact that they were close associates of the Minister, who was the executive authority of the NDoH, which was awarding the NHI media campaign contract," the report goes on to state.

The report revealed that Digital Vibes later paid for 6,720 rand (\$446) in repairs to Mkhize's home; transferred almost 300,000 rand (\$20,000) into Mkhize's son's account; and bought a 160,000 rand (\$10,625) Land Cruiser for his son's farm in Pietermaritzburg.

It also notes that after taking the contract, Digital Vibes "failed to declare and pay company tax and failed to pay the required VAT to the South African Revenue Service."

Mkhize resigned as health minister in August after being given special leave in June [by Rampahosa](#) “to attend to allegations and investigations.” His replacement, Joe Phaahla, said Thursday he had no connection to the contract or the case.

“I invite you all to read the report. It is not a question of bad-mouthing (one’s) colleagues but, if you look at the report, you won’t find any indication that as deputy minister I was consulted on the appointment,” [Phaahla told reporters](#). However, [his office noted](#) that six other officials from the health ministry had been suspended, pending conclusion of the probe and potential filing of charges.

However, one of those suspended is Anban Pillay, then-acting director-general of the health department, who was implicated for contravening sections of the Public Finance Management Act. The SIU recommended he be criminally prosecuted for financial misconduct.

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Trump to Sue to Block Release of White House Records on Capitol Hill Attack - Report
By - Adriana Montes

According to a report, Donald Trump is threatening to invoke executive privilege as he prepares to sue in an effort to block the release of White House records from his administration to the House select committee — responsible for scrutinizing the January 6 attack on the Capitol, triggering a potentially long battle over disclosure.

The former president also expects key aides – former White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows, Deputy Chief of Staff Dan Scavino, strategist Steve Bannon and Defense Assistant Kash Patel – to defy subpoenas of the special committee for records and testimony.

“We will fight subpoenas on the basis of executive privilege and other grounds for the good of our country, pending whether or not subpoenas will be sent to Antifa and BLM for the death and destruction that they caused,” Trump [reportedly](#) said shortly after the subpoenas were issued. Constitutional clashes in the courts are anticipated and will likely be a result of Trump’s effort in trying to resist the select committee — ultimately testing the power of the congressional oversight authority over executive power.

The select committee is made up of seven Democratic lawmakers and only two Republican lawmakers: Reps. Liz Cheney (R-WY) and Adam Kinzinger (R-IL) - both appointed by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA).

Trump said in recent days that he will cite [executive privilege](#) to counter House select committee investigators seeking to compel his top aides to testify around January 6 and what he knew of plans to halt endorsement of President Joe Biden’s electoral victory.

The former president seeks to retain control over the rapidly escalating investigation into the January 6 events that left five dead and about 140 others injured.

If Trump fails to block the House select committee investigators from receiving Trump’s White House files, the National Archives will proceed in allowing both the Biden administration and Trump to examine the documents relating to claims of executive privilege.

Once the [National Archives](#) identifies and releases the records requested by the select committee to Biden and Trump, Trump has 30 days to review the records and ask the administration to assert executive privilege over everything to stop their publication. As president, Biden has final authority in asserting the necessary protection of specific documents, giving him power to authorize their release despite Trump's objections. Trump, however, can then sue in retaliation to their release – a legal strategy Trump and his advisers prepare to pursue as it could hinder the investigation by the select committee. Trump's approach to such legal challenges and the elements surrounding the lawsuit are currently undetermined.

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Manchin Proposed \$1.5T Top-Line Number for Reconciliation Bill to Schumer
By - Adriana Montes

Sen. Joe Manchin (R-WV) is floating a \$1.5 trillion top-line deal to Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) for the multi-trillion-dollar reconciliation package after a report revealed that he would only contribute that amount earlier this summer.

The one-page accord — dated July 28 — was a proposal by Manchin to limit the total cost of Democrats' sweeping spending bill to \$1.5 trillion, "no earlier than October 1," according to a [copy of the agreement](#) obtained by POLITICO.

Manchin [spoke with reporters](#) on Thursday about remaining adamant to that number.

"As you've seen, I think by now, the 1.5 (trillion dollars) was always done from, from my heart, basically [as] what we could do and not jeopardize—not jeopardize our economy," he said.

In the document, Manchin proposes raising the capital gains tax rate to 28 percent, the corporate tax rate to 25 percent, and the top tax rate on income to 39.6 percent — the agreement added that "any revenue exceeding \$1.5T" would be used for deficit reduction.

It was [reported](#) that the West Virginia Senator had been distributing the July agreement to his Democratic colleagues and leaders to prove that he delivered his terms on Biden's Build Back Better agenda.

A spokesperson for Schumer [reported](#) that while the Democratic leader never "agreed" to the terms, "he merely acknowledged where Sen. Manchin was on the subject at the time."

"Sen. Manchin did not rule out voting for a reconciliation bill that exceeded the ideas he outlined, and Leader Schumer made clear that he would work to convince Sen. Manchin to support a final reconciliation bill," the spokesperson added.

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Trump Calls Milley a "Weak Sister" Who Was 'Too Scared to Come Talk to Me'
By - Adriana Montes

Trump blasted Gen. Mark Milley as “weak” and “too afraid” to talk to him after learning of the discreet phone calls to China that he made towards the end of the Trump administration and for his handling of Afghanistan under President Biden.

Milley admitted in [congressional testimony](#) on Tuesday to calling the Chinese both in January after the Capitol riot on January 6, as well as in October 2020, in which he pledged to warn them of any rogue action Trump foreseen to take during his final days in office.

Trump, in a [radio interview](#) with KTTH’s “The Jason Rantz Show,” said that China was more concerned about the tariffs he was imposing rather than a nuclear attack from the US, adding that Milley had no reason to be involved.

“Nobody has to get in between me and negotiations,” the former president said of Milley’s call. “China was very concerned about what I was doing economically and nobody has to get in and say, ‘Oh, don’t worry about things, things will be just fine,’” Trump said. “Not good. Not appropriate.”

Trump didn’t hold back in taunting Milley’s character.

“He was afraid to come in and talk to me,” Trump said. “He was a weak sister, I found that out. He was a weak man.”

The former president went on to say the poor withdrawal of Afghanistan confirmed his judgment of Miley’s supposed weakness.

“No wonder the Afghanistan withdrawal was such a disaster.”

Trump defended himself from critics that blamed the agreement made with the Taliban under his administration for the poor withdrawal from Afghanistan.

“We had a great agreement, no soldiers were killed in 18 months and it was all condition-based,” he said.

“He took the military out before anything else. Nobody’s ever seen anything so stupid,” he added.

Milley [told the Senate Armed Services Committee](#) on Tuesday that he had advised Biden against a full withdrawal, and that he recommended keeping 2,500 troops in Afghanistan.

The former president also discussed the coronavirus vaccines — speaking out against vaccine mandates — but continued to encourage people to take the shot.

Without the vaccines, he said, the world would have “millions of more deaths.”

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Video: Woman Fights Off Leopard With Walking Stick in Mumbai

By - Adriana Montes

A 55-year-old woman fended off an attack by a leopard that crept up on her outside her home Wednesday evening in the Aarey Colony suburb of Mumbai, India, with nothing but just a walking stick.

The shocking footage was captured by CCTV.

In the video, the woman, identified as Nirmaladevi Singh, is seen walking out of her house in complete darkness with the assistance of her walking stick. She then proceeds to sit down on

what appears to be an elevated platform, when the predator with a menacing glare walks out of the bushes and prowls toward Singh from behind.

The woman bravely fights off the vicious animals with just her walking stick, striking the wild cat multiple times before crying out for help.

Officials reported that Singh sustained minor injuries with lacerations to the face, neck and back during the attack.

Gajanan Hire — who is in charge of the Thane Forest Division — [reported](#) to the Times of India that the claw marks clearly indicated that the attack was carried out by a sub-adult leopard.

“Immediately after the first attack was reported over a month ago, we sought permission from the principal chief conservator of forests to trap the animal,” he said.

“There is a protocol to be followed before we can lay the trap, and which is being done.”

The incident has been [reported](#) as the third leopard attack in a week in the Aarey Colony - a residential area north of Mumbai that neighbors open forest.

Forest officials have set up camera traps and trap cages to avoid future incidents.

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Biden Signs Continuing Resolution to Fund US Gov't Through December 3

By - Nevin Brown

On Thursday, President Joe Biden signed the stopgap funding bill that will provide funding for the government through December 3rd.

The [Senate passed the bill by a vote of 65-35](#) and the House approved the bill by a 254-175 vote before it was sent to President Joe Biden for his signature. Hours later, President Biden signed H.R. 5305 into law and avoided a government shutdown, which would have taken effect on Friday.

Along with preventing a government shutdown, the bill also provides funds to states to recover from natural disasters and resettle Afghan refugees. The bill did not raise the debt ceiling, which the Treasury Department projects will be hit on October 18th.

Democrats backed off of tackling the debt ceiling in the bill to appease Republicans. If the US doesn't raise the debt ceiling by the projected October 18th deadline it [will face a financial](#)

With funding for the government squared away, lawmakers now turn their attention to President Joe Biden's \$1.2 trillion infrastructure bill. The bill has already passed in the Senate but awaits a vote in the House. [Progressive Democrats want to pass their bill known as the Build Back Better Act](#), before negotiating and voting on the infrastructure bill.

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Will Liverpool's Defence Cost Them the Title?

By - Nevin Brown

Liverpool sit atop the Premier League on the strength of their attack. Through six games they lead the league in goals scored at 15 and expected goals at 16.9. As mentioned earlier, leading in expected goals is a great way to win the title. While Liverpool have been excellent in attack, their defence leaves some cause for concern.

Through six games, Liverpool have conceded four goals, but 7.0 expected goals against. Having an elite keeper like Alisson in goal can help a team outperform their expected metrics, but having the 8th best defence is not a recipe for titles.

Manchester City and Liverpool are neck and neck in goal differential and expected goal differential. In a season where the title race looks incredibly tight, Liverpool's defence could be the deciding factor.

It's not entirely clear what is plaguing Liverpool's defence. They have an impressive stable of centre backs in Virgil Van Dijk, Joel Matip, Joe Gomez, and Ibrahim Konate, and Fabinho has cemented his place as one of the best defensive midfielders in the world. The main difference in this season's side is the absence of Georginio Wijnaldum.

The industrious midfielder was an integral part of Liverpool's midfield. Wijnaldum excelled in two crucial areas that could explain Liverpool's defensive decline.

The first is that he was nearly impossible to dispossess. With the near-universal adoption of the high press, having a press-resistant midfielder has become incredibly important to stifle opponents' attacks. The second area was his ability to cover ground. Defending is about being in the right position and few players covered as much ground as Wijnaldum.

Liverpool have the depth in the midfield to right these wrongs. However, it would have been a lot easier to replace Wijnaldum by simply giving him a contract extension. If Liverpool's defence doesn't improve, they'll have a hard time reclaiming the Premier League title.

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Can Everton, Brighton, or West Ham Crack the Top Four?

By - Nevin Brown

While it looks unlikely that this is the season the Liverpool-Manchester City hegemony at the top is broken, there are a few new contenders that look poised to challenge for the top four. Everton and Brighton sit on 13 points in a five-way tie for second, and West Ham occupies the next spot with 11 points.

Brighton

Brighton were last season's analytics darlings. The club finished 16th in the table but had the fifth best expected goals differential. While some might use this as evidence that expected goals are rubbish, it needs to be noted that the teams that finished one through four all qualified for the Champions League. Brighton, based upon the analytics, looked poised for a charge up the table this season, and they haven't disappointed, except, they have.

Brighton sit in sixth with a +3 goal differential, but have a negative expected goal differential of -1.3. For as unlucky as Brighton were last season, they've been equally lucky this season. The most notable change between the two campaigns is the loss of Ben White to Arsenal.

The young English defender departed for a fee of £50 million, but it's unlikely that his absence alone is the cause of their decline in performance. Brighton are a hard side to predict going forward. They were legitimately excellent last season, but have been decidedly less so this campaign. With this many questions and their lack of top-tier talent they likely won't be hanging around the top four by season's end.

Everton

Everton, nipping at Liverpool's heels, has to have their fans excited. While Brighton have outperformed their metrics, Everton have posted the underlying numbers of a legitimately strong side. Their expected goal differential of +3.7 is third in the league and they're in the top four for both expected goals and expected goals allowed. The only question that remains is, can Everton beat a good team?

Everton's opening six matches have seen them play no teams with a positive expected goal differential. Picking up points against bottom feeders is necessary for any team to crack the top four, but there's a chance that Everton just won't be able to pick up enough points against the middle of the pack to keep pace with the big boys.

Everton have weathered injuries to their two best attackers, Dominic Calvert-Lewin and Richarlison, which provides optimism that they are for real. At the end of the day, their depth is not quite as good as the top teams, but they look to be real contenders for a Europa League spot.

West Ham

West Ham were three points away from qualifying for the Champions League last season, and have picked up right where they left off. Their expected goal differential of +3.4 is fourth in the league and they were a Mark Noble penalty away from being on 12 points. David Moyes' side has an identity and more talent than they're given credit for.

Michail Antonio's five-goal and three-assist tally from five matches this season has caught the media and opposition defences by surprise. While he may not be viewed as a superstar, he has quietly been one of the most dangerous players in the Premier League.

Over the last three Premier League seasons, Antonio has played 4,187 minutes, which equates to 46.5 full 90s. Over that same span, he has averaged 0.57 expected goals and 0.15 expected assists per 90 minutes. Over a full Premier League season, that equates to 21.6 goals and 5.7 assists, or, essentially, Mohamad Salah's 2020-21 campaign, where he bagged 22 goals and 5 assists.

The only reason Antonio isn't viewed as one of the best attackers in England is because of injury. If he can stay fit, West Ham have a legitimate superstar leading their attack.

West Ham is more than a one-man band. Their double pivot of Declan Rice and Thomas Soucek is one of the best in the business and Said Benrahma, Jarrod Bowen, and Pablo Fornals form a talented support group to Michail Antonio in attack.

The centre of their defence is sturdy, if unspectacular, and their wide backs are dangerous enough crossers to create width. However, the most crucial key to West Ham's success is that they have an identity. They're going to drop back on defence and blitz their opponents on the counter, and they're going to be good at it.

West Ham, if Antonio can stay healthy, have a great chance to claim a spot in the Champions League. They're not better than any of the presumptive top four, Manchester City, Liverpool,

Chelsea, and Manchester United, but if one of them slips up, they should be right there to capitalise.

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Are Arsenal Back, or is Tottenham That Bad?
By - Nevin Brown

The North London derby has become a global television event. While this is great for the Premier League's bottom line, it was not so great for Tottenham this time around. Arsenal thoroughly thrashed Spurs. In the first half, they cut through their defence like a flamethrower through butter.

However, the 3-1 win only saw Arsenal draw level on points with Tottenham at nine apiece. Arsenal and Tottenham are two ships sailing in opposite directions. Arsenal lost their first three games, only to win their next three, while Tottenham won their first three, only to lose their next three.

Are Arsenal roaring back? And is Tottenham a legitimately horrible side? The answer to both questions is, probably not.

Arsenal started the season injured and faced a daunting opening fixture list. They were the first team to get the Brentford experience, before we knew they were a side to be reckoned with, then they faced Manchester City and Chelsea.

Meanwhile, Tottenham started the season blazing hot in the most charitable sense of the phrase. They won their first three fixtures 1-0 against Manchester City, Wolves, and Watford. Arsenal were legitimately terrible over their first three matches. They produced 1.9 expected goals and allowed 8 expected goals against. Tottenham, on the other hand, were empirically mediocre. They produced an expected goals tally of 3.7 and allowed 3.9 expected goals against. Essentially, Tottenham was on a three-game winning streak because their opponents couldn't finish.

Since then, the script has flipped. Tottenham have been an unmitigated disaster and Arsenal have been mediocre. Chances are Tottenham and Arsenal will likely finish the season around a Europa League Conference spot, but they're both miles away from the Champions League. Tottenham will play better and Arsenal will come back to Earth. This is the danger of being a mid-table club with top-four aspirations. Small runs of poor or excellent form can trick your supporters into wild swings of despair and delight. At the end of the day, these are two slightly above-average teams.

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Major 'Cryptoization' Likely to Challenge Dollar in Coming Years - IMF

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - A major cryptoization that creates risks to financial stability and more avenues for tax evasion is likely in the coming years as mass use of cryptocurrencies challenge the standing of the dollar and other legal tender, the International Monetary Fund said in a report.

"Widespread and rapid adoption can pose significant challenges by reinforcing dollarization forces in the economy - or in this case cryptoization - where residents start using crypto assets instead of the local currency," the IMF said in the "Crypto Boom Poses New Challenges to Financial Stability," report.

In some emerging markets and developing economies, cryptoization can be driven by weak central bank credibility, vulnerable banking systems, inefficiencies in payment systems and limited access to financial services, the fund said.

"Authorities should prioritize strengthening macroeconomic policies and consider the benefits of issuing central bank digital currencies and improving payment systems. Central bank digital currencies may help reduce cryptoization pressures if they help satisfy a need for better payment technologies."

Policing of cryptocurrencies is being mulled as central banks around the world, including the US Federal Reserve, toy with the idea of having their own digital currencies. While central bank authorities agree that the monetary system of the future might largely be dictated by digital currencies, many are also wary of illegitimate activities from these and have been studying ways to counter them.

The IMF concurred with such worries, saying threats to fiscal policy could intensify along with challenges to revenue collection, given the potential for crypto assets to facilitate tax evasion.

"And seigniorage - the profits accruing from the right to issue currency - may also decline," the fund said.

Besides this, cryptoization can reduce the ability of central banks to effectively implement monetary policy and facilitate capital outflows that impact the foreign exchange market, the IMF said.

"It could also create financial stability risks, for example through funding and solvency risks arising from currency mismatches, as well as amplify the importance of some of the previously mentioned risks to consumer protection and financial integrity," the fund added.

From an environmental point of view, a migration of crypto "mining" activity out of China to other emerging markets and developing economies can have an important impact on domestic energy use, especially in countries that rely on more CO2-intensive forms of energy, as well as those that subsidize energy costs, the IMF said.

To illustrate how big cryptocurrencies have become, the fund said the industry's total market value had surpassed \$2 trillion as of September - a 10-fold increase since early 2020.

"An entire ecosystem is also flourishing, replete with exchanges, wallets, miners, and stablecoin issuers," it said.

Stablecoins - which aim to peg their value usually against the dollar - were particularly growing at what it described as "lightning speed", with supply climbing 4-fold throughout 2021 to reach \$120 billion, the IMF said.

"The term 'stablecoin', however, captures a very diverse group of crypto assets and can be misleading," the fund said. "Given the composition of their reserves, some stablecoins could be subject to runs, with knock-on effects to the financial system. The runs could be driven by

investor concerns about the quality of their reserves or the speed at which reserves can be liquidated to meet potential redemptions."

To effectively police cryptocurrencies, regulators and supervisors need to be able to monitor rapid developments in the crypto ecosystem and the risks they create by swiftly tackling data gaps, the IMF said.

"As the role of stablecoins grows, regulations should be proportionate to the risks they pose and the economic functions they serve. For example, rules should be aligned with entities that provide similar products," the IMF said, citing as example bank deposits or money market funds. It also said investigation standards focused on crypto assets were now mostly limited to money laundering and proposals on bank exposures.

"However, other international standards - in areas such as securities regulation, as well as payments, clearing and settlements - may also be applicable and need attention," the report said.

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US Confirms Blinken to Travel to Paris Oct 4-6 to Discuss Security in Indo-Pacific Region

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - The US State Department confirmed on Friday that US State Secretary Antony Blinken will travel to Paris from October 4-6 to meet with his French colleagues to discuss the US-French cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region.

Earlier in the day, reports emerged that the top US diplomat will travel to France to mend strained Washington-Paris ties over the newly formed AUKUS alliance's tanking of a multibillion-dollar defense deal between France and Australia.

"Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken will travel to Paris, France October 4 – 6 to chair the Ministerial Council Meeting (MCM) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and commemorate the organization's 60th anniversary," the statement from the state department said.

The US delegation will include the Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, the United States Trade Representative, the Chair of the Council of Economic Advisors, and the Under Secretary for Economic Growth, Energy and the Environment, according to the state department.

"Secretary Blinken will also meet with French counterparts to continue discussions on further strengthening the vital U.S.-France relationship on a range of issues including security in the Indo-Pacific region, the climate crisis, economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Transatlantic relationship, and working with our Allies and partners to address global challenges and opportunities," the department said.

From October 7-8, Blinken will also travel to Mexico City, Mexico, to lead the delegation to the US- Mexico High-Level Security Dialogue and to discuss bilateral relations.

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UN Committee on Peaceful Uses of Outer Space Membership Grew 30% in 7 years - Official

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - The membership of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) has grown by 32 percent in the last seven years, UN Office for Outer Space Affairs Director, Simonetta Di Pippo, told Sputnik.

"Currently, we have 95 Member States, with five additional applications presented this year. So, we are getting to 100 soon," Di Pippo said. "Also, we have permanent observers, which are reaching 45 at the end of this year, which doubles the number of permanent observers in the last few years. So, this means that the committee has increased its membership by 32% in the last seven years."

Di Pippo explained that such an increase means that international space law and the regulatory framework is becoming more important for an increasing number of countries. However, she also said they are far away from having reached out to all 193 UN member states.

Di Pippo stressed the importance of the Outer Space Treaty, a foundational and visionary document, which complements all the treaties they are dealing with. The UN space chief said the committee has been focused on topics like space resources and space traffic management, among others.

"So, I'm quite confident that we're going in the right direction," she said.

As more private companies are venturing into space, the debate has been ongoing in media whether the Outer Space Treaty is addressing commercial activities properly. The OST bans the national appropriation of space resources but fails to mention whether a business can claim property rights.

The OST entered into force in 1967 and has since served as a backbone of international space law.

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UN Can Offer Convening Power to Find Balance Amid Growing Satellite Launches - Space Chief

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - The United Nations can offer its convening power to bring all relevant parties to the table in order to find the needed balance in the wake of increasing numbers of launched satellites, UN Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA) Director, Simonetta Di Pippo, told Sputnik.

"Clearly, the number of players in the space sector is increasing, the number of satellites launched is increasing," Di Pippo said. "We need to have all the relevant actors around the table in order to be able to find the right balance. This discussion can only be done on a multilateral level. Clearly, we can offer the convening power of the UN, where we are able to put together all the players and have all the stakeholders talking and presenting their ideas, their requirements, their needs, so that member states can find the best possible solutions."

Di Pippo said amid plans of some countries to launch constellations with thousands of satellites, the United Nations is really working hard with different initiatives to try to have players conducting operations more responsibly in line with the existing rules so that they can try to mitigate and to reduce drastically the production of debris.

The UN advocates for the so-called rules of the orbit which need to be negotiated at the international level, she added.

Di Pippo also said the number of registered and launched satellites differ because some countries do not have national registration systems in place.

The number of satellites orbiting the Earth will increase from 2,000 to 50,000 in the next 15 years, Andrey Tsvetkov, the head of an engineering center at Central Research Institute for Machine Building, a part of the national space corporation Roscosmos, said in May.

Russia is currently creating its multi-satellite orbital group Sfera, which will rival the existing OneWeb and Starlink constellations of communication satellites, developed in the United Kingdom and the United States, respectively.

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Talks on Creating Working Group on Sustainable Use of Space Progressing - UN Space Chief

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - Talks on the establishment of a UN working group on the long-term sustainability of the use of outer space are advancing and soon there will be an announcement on how the group wants to continue, UN Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA) Director, Simonetta Di Pippo, told Sputnik.

"The Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space [COPUOS] took place at the end of August - the beginning of September and there have been debates around the topic and the activities are going ahead," Di Pippo said about the working group. "In practice, we see quite a good trend. A group of 21 guidelines was approved, back in 2019, and now this new working group is deciding on what they want to focus on so I believe, soon we will have some important news on how they want to continue."

Di Pippo noted that COPUOS throughout the years has considered different aspects of the long-term sustainability of outer space activities, and back in 2010, the scientific and technical subcommittee started to consider agenda items. A number of topics, she added, were addressed under this working group such as space debris, space operations, and space weather, to name a few.

She said the 21 guidelines approved by consensus in 2019 are considered quite a big achievement.

"Clearly these guidelines provide guidance on the policy and regulatory framework for space activities, safe space operations, international cooperation, capacity building and awareness," Di Pippo added.

In addition, Di Pippo pointed out that the working group also established a scientific and technical subcommittee. Di Pippo said the working group is open to all member states of the committee.

Last year, UNOOSA told Sputnik that it was forming a working group on the sustainable use of space after 10 years of work dedicated to the formalization of guidelines. COPUOS was expected to consider matters related to the working group during a session last year, but it was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

COPUOS has been seeking to ensure that the "Space2030" agenda, envisaging space as a driving force in sustainable development, plays a role in achieving the corresponding goals that the UN looks to achieve in 10 years.

In recent years, more countries have joined space activities, with many of them launching their own satellites to the Earth's Orbit. The increase in space activities has sparked concerns about the militarization of space as well as the proliferation of space debris.

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Space Tourism Market May Grow in Coming Years, Boosted by New Technology - UN Space Chief

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - Space tourism will likely grow in the near future boosted by new technology and capabilities, UN Office for Outer Space Affairs Director, Simonetta Di Pippo, told Sputnik.

"First of all, let's say that tourism in space is not a new phenomenon, because we had some space tourists in the past mainly flying away with the Russian Soyuz capsule to the space station," Di Pippo said. "However, it's clear that with new technology and capabilities, space tourism could become a market in itself and grow in the coming years."

Earlier this year, the richest man on the planet, founder of Amazon and Blue Origin Jeff Bezos, flew into space on the New Shepard spacecraft, accompanied by three more people not long after billionaire Richard Branson accomplished the same feat.

Di Pippo also said she expects these types of flights will be used more and more for conducting experiments in microgravity conditions.

When asked about safety guidelines for space tourism companies, Di Pippo stressed that all the companies have to be in line with the International rules.

"That means that to fly they have to get a license from their authorities," she explained.

The United States - like all the other countries - must ensure all requirements and treaties - like the International Space Law at large - are being respected before issuing licenses, Di Pippo added.

Di Pippo said considerations about these issues have already resonated at the recent UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) and its subcommittees and she is certain the work will continue in this context.

COPUOS, established by the UNGA in 1959, held its 64th session from August 25-September 3.

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UN Sees Growing Number of Space Objects, Calls for More Vigilance - Space Office Chief

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is seeing increasing numbers of space objects and is emphasizing the necessity to be more vigilant than before, UN Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA) Director, Simonetta Di Pippo, told Sputnik.

"On one side we see that the rules and principles, treaties, everything is implemented very carefully. At the same time, we are also seeing a growing number of space objects and so this means we collectively need to be even more vigilant than before," Di Pippo said.

Di Pippo stressed that both the committee and the Office of Outer Space Affairs pay a lot of attention to issues of space debris.

"In particular, in trying to prevent and mitigate the creation of new debris, there is a continuous exchange of information between member states when we have our meetings," she said.

The UN space chief noted that the space debris mitigation guidelines were endorsed by the General Assembly back in 2007. They put together a sort of a compendium of space debris mitigation standards.

"Space debris is also one of the topics that you can find on the 21 guidelines approved for the long- term sustainability," she added. "What we see is the member states are using, let's say, are in a way providing licenses to the operators which request the approval from the national authorities that the space debris mitigation guidelines are really followed. So, we see quite a good approach from the operators in this field."

Up to 150 tonnes of space trash fall to the Earth every year and over 9,000 tonnes are circulating in orbit at any given time, according to materials showcased by Roscosmos at the Startup Village 2021 fair in Moscow's Skolkovo Innovation Center in May.

In figures, it comes to 25,000 bits of debris up to 4 inches in size, about 900,000 bits up to 0.4 inches, and over 128 million bits smaller than that - and all travel 20 times faster than speed of sound, according to Roscosmos' presentation.

The space agency wants to partner up with private companies, banks and venture capital through concession to create a monitoring system of debris and other dangerous space objects, it said in the presentation. The concession is expected to be launched in 2022 and remain in effect until 2045.

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UN Hopes ISS to Remain Until 2030 With All Partners Fully Involved - Space Chief

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is hopeful that the International Space Station (ISS) will remain operational until the year 2030 with all partners fully engaged, UN Office for Outer Space Affairs Director, Simonetta Di Pippo, told Sputnik.

"I'm confident that the space station will stay there with all the partners fully involved until 2030. That is my hope, but I cannot say anything on behalf of member states," Di Pippo said. "They launched another module to the station [and] when you send it up to the station you want to benefit from your investment. And so, if you launch a module, then you want the module to stay there functioning, providing results from a scientific standpoint for a certain number of years, in principle for a long period of time."

Di Pippo pointed out, however, the ISS is something developed on the basis of an intergovernmental agreement and is completely separate from what they do at the UN at least from the standpoint of how the legal framework is being built. She went on to underscore that the space station is becoming quite old, and there are some other initiatives to develop other space stations in lower orbit from different countries.

NASA Administrator Bill Nelson told Sputnik that he hopes US-Russian cooperation in the ISS will continue beyond 2030. Russian State Space Corporation Roscosmos chief Dmitry Rogozin is expected to discuss the possibility of extending the ISS operation beyond 2024 at his meeting with Nelson, set to take place in the fall. Russia is planning to stop using the ISS by 2028 and will create a national space station instead given risks posed by ISS worn-out equipment.

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UN Space Office Chief Confirms Regional Center to Open in Russia by Year End

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - The United Nations expects to announce the creation of a new regional center for space science and technology education in Russia by the end of year, Simonetta Di Pippo, UN Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA) Director, Simonetta Di Pippo, told Sputnik.

"COPUOS approved the creation of a Regional Center for Space Science and Technology Education affiliated to the United Nations in the Russian Federation, and the UNGA should confirm it by the end of the year, so it's a big achievement," Di Pippo said. "Russia is really quite a big country, and the creation of a regional center for space science and technology education can serve all the Russian speaking countries, so you can understand that it's a huge amount of people who can be trained thanks to them."

The facility will be run by the Roscosmos Academy, which established a partnership with several universities in Russia, Di Pippo said, adding that the network will be well structured. Both sides went through a rigorous process to prepare for approval of the new center, Di Pippo said. UNOOSA previously partnered with Russia in a number of capacity building workshops, including on matters related to space law and policy, Di Pippo added, and noted that the organization has six regional centers.

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Biden Signs Legislation to Fund US Government Through December 3

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden signed legislation to fund the US government through December 3, the White House said in a press release.

"On Thursday, September 30, 2021, the President signed into law: H.R. 5305, the 'Extending Government Funding and Delivering Emergency Assistance Act' which includes a short-term continuing resolution that provides fiscal year 2022 appropriations to Federal agencies through December 3, 2021, for continuing projects and activities of the Federal Government; includes supplemental appropriations for disaster relief; includes supplemental appropriations for Afghanistan evacuees; and extends several expiring authorizations," the release said on Thursday.

US federal funding was set to expire tonight at midnight.

The bill measure includes \$28.6 billion in emergency disaster assistance and \$6.3 billion to assist Afghan refugees resettle in the United States.

The House of Representatives and Senate passed the short-term funding bill earlier in the day. Congressional Democrats and the Biden administration have been attempting to juggle a time-sensitive legislative agenda that includes funding the government to prevent a shutdown, raising the debt ceiling, and passing a major infrastructure deal.

Attempts to suspend the debt ceiling and prevent a default have been twice halted by Senate Republicans led by Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, despite the House already having voted to suspend it through December 16, 2022.

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US Court Allows Biden Admin to Use Trump-Era Border Policy to Expel Migrants - Filing

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - A US court blocked a judge's ruling that would have prohibited the Biden administration from continuing a Trump-era policy that authorizes the immediate expulsion of asylum-seeking migrant families arriving on the southern border, according to a court document.

"Further ordered that the motion for stay pending appeal be granted. Appellants have satisfied the stringent requirements for a stay pending appeal," the court document said on Thursday.

The Trump-era rule referred to in this decision is Title 42, which is used to authorize the immediate expulsion of asylum-seeking migrants at the US border as part of an effort to contain the spread of the novel coronavirus.

Lee Gelernt, an attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union rights group, said in a statement that the court's ruling is disappointing but that it is an initial step in the appellate litigation.

The court document said a briefing for an appeal is scheduled on October 21.

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US Navy Awards Fluor Marine More Than \$1.1Bln Nuclear Propulsion Contract - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - The US Navy has given Fluor Marine Propulsion a more than \$1.1 billion modification contract to continue its work on nuclear propulsion systems at the Naval Nuclear Laboratory, the Defense Department announced.

"Fluor Marine Propulsion [of] Arlington, Virginia is awarded a \$1,163,470,003 ... modification to previously awarded contract to exercise the fiscal 2022 option for naval nuclear propulsion work at the Naval Nuclear Laboratory," the Defense Department said in a press release on Thursday. Most of the work on the contract will be performed in Schenectady in the US state of New York (47%) and in Pittsburgh in the US state of Pennsylvania (44%), the Defense Department said. The Naval Sea Systems Command in Washington, DC is the contracting activity for supervising the contract, the Defense Department added.

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US Awards \$85Mln Contract for 6 Ukraine Patrol Boats - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - The US Navy has awarded an \$84 million contract to SAFE Boats International to build at least six military patrol boats for Ukraine, the Defense Department said.

"SAFE Boats International, Bremerton, Washington, is awarded an \$84,254,484 firm-fixed-price modification to previously awarded contract N00024-21-C-2201 for the detail design, construction, outfitting, reactivation, and training for six Mark VI patrol boats, with an option for two more," the Defense Department said in a press release said on Thursday. "This effort will provide MK VI PBs to Ukraine towards fulfilling Building Partner Capacity and Foreign Military Financing."

The production of the boats is expected to be complete by March 2025, the release said.

In 2020, the US State Department approved the \$600 million sale of 16 Mark VI armed patrol boats to Ukraine. The sale also includes lethal weapons such as 32 MSI Seahawk A2 gun systems and 40 MK44 cannons.

In March, the Defense Department announced a new \$125 million assistance package for Ukraine that included two additional armed Mark VI patrol boats, training, equipment and funding for advisory efforts. The United States has committed more than \$2.5 billion in security assistance to Ukraine since 2014, according to the Department of Defense.

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US Gives Tentative Approval for Australia to Buy EA-18G Growler Aircraft - Defense Agency

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - The US government has given its tentative approval for Australia to purchase a single EA-18G Growler aircraft with engineering and maintenance services costing \$125 million, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) announced.

"The State Department has made a determination approving a possible Foreign Military Sale to the Government of Australia of EA-18G Growler aircraft, related defense services and related equipment for an estimated cost of \$125 million," the DSCA said in a statement on Thursday. The agency delivered the required certification notifying Congress of the possible sale on Thursday, the statement said.

"The Government of Australia has requested to buy a United States Navy (USN) EA-18G aircraft. The USN EA-18G aircraft will then be modified into a Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) EA-18G aircraft configuration. The sale would include one EA-18G Growler aircraft," the statement added.

The total estimated value is \$125 million and the proposed sale will support the foreign policy and national security objectives of the United States, according to the statement.

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US Navy Approves Production of Anti-Radiation Longer Range Missile - Northrop Grumman

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - The US Navy has given the go-ahead to proceed with initial low-rate production of a new extended-range anti-radiation guided missile, Northrop Grumman announced.

"The US Navy has awarded Northrop Grumman Corporation the contract to proceed with low rate initial production (LRIP) for the AGM-88G Advanced Anti-Radiation Guided Missile Extended Range (AARGM-ER)," the release said on Thursday.

As the AARGM-ER prime contractor, Northrop Grumman has worked with a team of US Navy and industry partners to develop an effective, production missile design, reaching its Milestone C in the process just 28 months after receiving its engineering and manufacturing development award, the company said.

"LRIP marks a significant step forward for AARGM-ER and the confidence the US Navy has in the program and its capabilities," US Navy Program Manager Alex Dutko said. "AARGM-ER will provide the US Navy and our allies with unmatched protection."

The AARGM-ER is a major upgrade to existing AARGM, now in production and fielded with the US Navy and many allies. It is being integrated on the Navy's F/A-18E/F Super Hornet and EA-18G Growler aircraft as well as the US Air Force F-35A, Marine Corps F-35B and Navy F-35C aircraft, Northrop Grumman said.

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Russian Businessman Tinkov Pleads Not Guilty to US Tax Evasion Charges - Lawyer

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - Russian Businessman Oleg Tinkov pleaded not guilty to US tax evasion charges, his lawyer Ismail Ramsey said.

"Not guilty," Ramsey said during a virtual hearing in front of US Magistrate Judge Nathaniel Cousins on Thursday.

Tinkov, founder of commercial bank Tinkoff, was indicted in 2019 on two counts of lying to the US government's Internal Revenue Service about his income and taxes. His trial was postponed as he received treatment for leukemia.

US Attorney Michelle Kane noted during the hearing that Tinkov is presently in the United Kingdom and tries to mitigate extradition proceedings to the United States.

"As part of those proceedings, the defendant is subject to grant of bail with certain conditions," Kane said.

Under those conditions, Tinkov should stay in the London area, remain at his home address or any other address provided to the court, but he cannot approach any airport for international travels, Kane added.

Judge Cousins noted that Tinkov will appear before the court on Friday, October 1 at 9:30 a.m. Pacific time (16:30 p.m. GMT).

On September 20, Russian media, citing documents sent to the court, reported that Tinkov and the US Justice Department reached a settlement and agreed to settle tax claims.

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Bipartisan US Legislation Seeks Protection for Nuclear Safety Whistleblowers - Senator

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - Employees at the US Department of Energy (DOE) and Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) who report safety violations would be protected by legislation intended to close a loophole in existing whistleblower protection laws under bipartisan legislation announced by Senator Chuck Grassley.

"This bill reiterates our intent and clarifies the law to make it clear that whistleblowers who call attention to nuclear safety violations are protected from retaliation," Grassley said in a press release on Thursday.

Grassley said Congress intended to protect workers at both agencies with the Energy Policy Act of 2005, only to have that protection quashed by court rulings that cited the law's lack of an unequivocal waiver of sovereign immunity - a principle that shields the US government from lawsuits.

Senator Tammy Duckworth, a cosponsor of the legislation, said, "The legal loophole that now denies DOE and NRC employees full whistleblower protections when engaging in protected activity ultimately weakens oversight, accountability and public confidence in the industry."

The legislation was introduced by Grassley and Senator James Lankford, both Republicans, as well Duckworth and Senator Ron Wyden, both Democrats, according to the release.

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GE, MagniX Sign Contracts to Develop Electrified Aircraft Propulsion By 2035 - NASA

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - General Electric Aviation and MagniX have won two contracts to develop mature Electrified Aircraft Propulsion systems for US commercial domestic air travel over the next 14 years, NASA announced.

"NASA has selected two US companies to support its Electric Powertrain Flight Demonstration (EPFD) that will rapidly mature Electrified Aircraft Propulsion (EAP) technologies through ground and flight demonstrations," the space agency said on Thursday. "Through the EPFD program, NASA seeks to introduce EAP technologies to US aviation fleets no later than 2035."

General Electric Aviation of Cincinnati, Ohio, has received the contract worth \$179 million and MagniX USA of Redmond, Washington, one worth \$74.3million. The new technologies will support short-range and regional commercial air travel, as well as single-aisle seat transports, NASA said.

"By taking these concepts to flight, NASA and its partners will accelerate the transition of EAP technologies into commercial products and be a catalyst for economic growth," NASA Aeronautics Research Mission Directorate Associate Administrator Robert Pearce said.

Over the next five years, the two companies will conduct ground and flight test demonstrations of their EAP technologies. They will collaborate with other NASA projects, conduct flight test instrumentation, and data analysis and will stimulate spiral developments of megawatt-class EAP systems and technology, NASA said.

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US Urges Transparent Probe Into Killing of Rohingya Leader Mohib Ullah - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - The United States is calling for a full and transparent investigation into the killing of the informal leader of nearly a million Rohingya living in Bangladesh who was shot dead in the country's largest refugee camp, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.

"We are deeply saddened and disturbed by the murder of Rohingya Muslim advocate and community leader Mohib Ullah in Bangladesh on September 29," Blinken said in a statement on Thursday. "We urge a full and transparent investigation into his death with the goal of holding the perpetrators of this heinous crime accountable. We will honor his work by continuing to advocate for Rohingya and lift up the voices of members of the community in decisions about their future."

Ullah, chair of the Arakan Rohingya Society for Peace and Human Rights, was assaulted by unidentified gunmen on Wednesday after having received multiple death threats in recent years.

Blinken said Ullah was a brave and fierce advocate for the human rights of Rohingya Muslims around the world.

"He traveled to the Human Rights Council in Geneva and to the United States to speak at the Ministerial to Advance Religious Freedom in 2019. During his trip, he shared his experiences with the President and Vice President and spoke together with other survivors of religiously motivated persecution," Blinken added.

Human Rights Watch said the Ullah documented alleged crimes committed by the Myanmar military against the minority Muslim population, many of whom fled to neighboring Bangladesh since the start of the security forces' crackdown in 2017. It urged Bangladesh to promptly investigate Ullah's murder.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) -

US-RUSSIA STRATEGIC STABILITY DIALOGUE

- * The talks between the Russian and the US delegations in Geneva were "intensive and substantive," a joint statement released by the State Department said.
- * The US-Russian bilateral advisory commission on the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) will begin its work in Geneva on October 5, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said.
- * The third plenary meeting in the framework of the US-Russia dialogue on strategic stability will take place after the meetings of the working groups, the Russian Foreign Ministry said on Thursday after the second meeting in Geneva.
- * Russia's position on the unacceptability of the US military presence in Central Asia remains unchanged, Ryabkov said.
- * Russia and the United States have made "slow progress" in their strategic stability talks as many differences remain, but both countries share the desire to continue working on solving the issues, Ryabkov said.

PUTIN-ERDOGAN TALKS

- * Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Thursday that he discussed space cooperation with Russian President Vladimir Putin during their meeting in Sochi and noted that launches from land and sea platforms were also on the agenda.
- * Erdogan said that he discussed with Putin Russia's possible participation in the construction of two more nuclear power plants (NPPs) in Turkey and invited the Russian president to pay a return visit.
- * At the recent meeting with Erdogan, Putin stressed the need for compromise decisions on the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.
- * Putin and Erdogan discussed defense cooperation, including the supply of S-400 anti-aircraft weapon system and the possibility of producing some components on the Turkish territory, Peskov said.
- * Putin and Erdogan discussed space cooperation and preparations for the spaceflight of a Turkish astronaut, Peskov said.

ETHIOPIA DEVELOPMENTS

- * UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Thursday he was shocked to learn about Ethiopia's decision to expel seven United Nations employees, including senior officials, and the world body is now engaging with Addis Ababa to allow the affected staff to continue their work in the country.
- * The United States condemns Ethiopia for expelling United Nations' humanitarian organizations personnel working in the country and calls upon the Security Council to take urgent action, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said.

* The Biden administration is preparing to impose sanctions on individuals and entities in Ethiopia if no "clear and concrete changes" take place in the country in the realm of the ongoing conflict in the Tigray region, Psaki said.

US DEBT CEILING

* The United States should abolish its debt ceiling to ensure that spending passed in Congress under any administration goes through without a crisis, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said in a congressional testimony on Thursday.

* The US House of Representatives passed a piece of legislation on Thursday that will fund the federal government through December 3, consequently sending the legislation that already passed the Senate to President Joe Biden's desk to sign into law.

US ECONOMY

* US Gross Domestic Product expanded by 6.7% in the second quarter of 2021, the Commerce Department said in its final reading for April-June growth, putting growth 0.1% higher than previously estimated.

* US stocks posted one of their worst monthly losses for 2021 in September, with the major equity indexes on the New York Stock Exchange losing 4% to 5.3% on concerns of inflation and fiscal uncertainty amid disagreements between Democrats and Republicans in Congress.

SARKOZY CASE

* A court in Paris found ex-French President Nicolas Sarkozy guilty of illegal campaign financing in his unsuccessful 2012 re-election bid, a Sputnik correspondent reported from the courtroom.

* A court in Paris convicted Sarkozy to one year of imprisonment after finding him guilty of illegal campaign financing in the unsuccessful 2012 re-election bid, a Sputnik correspondent reported from the courtroom.

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Californian Synagogue Shooter Sentenced to Life in Prison Without Parole - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - California man John Earnest was formally sentenced to life in prison without parole over the 2019 attack on a synagogue that left one worshiper dead and three others injured, media reported.

Earnest initially faced the death penalty but under a plea agreement accepted by San Diego Superior Court Judge Peter Deddeh, he avoided the execution, according to CNN.

Earlier in September, Earnest pleaded guilty to a 113-count hate crime, admitting that he set an Escondido mosque ablaze and opened fire in a Poway synagogue "because he wanted to kill Muslims and Jews," the Justice Department said back then, adding that "there is no place in American society for this type of hate-fueled violence."

Earnest, who was 19 at the time of the incident, opened fire inside the synagogue during a religious service, killing one person and injuring three others and was then chased by members of the congregation. He fled the scene of the shootings in his car but was later captured by law enforcement officers who discovered the AR-15 automatic rifle and magazines of ammunition in his car.

An open anti-Semitic letter was posted online several hours before the attack by Earnest in which he pointed out that he had started preparations for the attack shortly after the Christchurch mosque shooting in New Zealand.

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US Court Says Tinkov Must Stay Within London Area, Avoid Airports or Global Travel Hubs

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - Russian businessman Oleg Tinkov appeared before a US court on Thursday where he pleaded not guilty to charges of lying to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) before receiving pretrial conditions including limited travel and a ban from airports. The US government's legal team proposed pretrial conditions for Tinkov that include banning him from going to airports or other international travel hubs, staying indoors at home between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. daily, and limiting travel to the M25 area of London. Tinkov's legal team agreed to the conditions.

Tinkov, founder of commercial bank Tinkoff, was indicted in 2019 on two counts of lying to the US government's Internal Revenue Service about his income and taxes. His trial was postponed as he received treatment for leukemia.

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US Stocks in Deep Red for September, Major Indices Down 4%-5% for Month

NEW YORK, September 30 (Sputnik) - US stocks posted one of their worst monthly losses for 2021 in September, with the major equity indexes on the New York Stock Exchange losing 4% to 5.3% on concerns of inflation and fiscal uncertainty amid disagreements between Democrats and Republicans in Congress.

The broad-based Dow Jones Industrial Average, comprising mostly industrial stocks, settled at 33,844, down 4% for September. The blue-chip S&P 500, which groups the top 500 stocks on the New York Stock Exchange, settled down at 4,305, down 5% for the month. The Nasdaq Composite Index, led by Big Tech names such as Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix and Google, finished at 14,449, down 5.3% for the month.

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Russian Businessman Tinkov Pleads Not Guilty to US Tax Evasion Charges – Lawyer

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) – Russian Businessman Oleg Tinkov pleaded not guilty to US tax evasion charges, his lawyer Ismail Ramsey said on Thursday.

“Not guilty,” Ramsey said during a virtual hearing in front of US Magistrate Judge Nathaniel Cousins.

Tinkov, founder of commercial bank Tinkoff, was indicted in 2019 on two counts of lying to the US government’s Internal Revenue Service about his income and taxes. His trial was postponed as he received treatment for leukemia.

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Over 2Mln US Teens Smoke E-Cigarettes, 8 in 10 Use Flavored Versions - Health Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) – E-cigarette use by young Americans remains a serious public health concern, with more than 2 million teens using the electronic nicotine delivery devices and over 80% of those preferring flavored versions, according to results of a joint study by the Centers For Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) released on Thursday.

“These data highlight the fact that flavored e-cigarettes are still extremely popular with kids,” FDA Center For Tobacco Products Director Mitch Zeller said in a press release explaining the study results. “The FDA continues to take action against those who sell or target e-cigarettes and e-liquids to kids, as seen just this year by the denial of more than one million premarket applications for flavored electronic nicotine delivery system products. It is critical that these products come off the market and out of the hands of our nation’s youth.”

The study’s results, published in the CDC’s Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, were based on data from the 2021 National Youth Tobacco Survey (NYTS), a cross-sectional, self-administered survey of US middle (grades 6–8) and high (grades 9–12) school students.

The study assessed current (used on one or more of the past 30 days) e-cigarette use; frequency of use; and use by device type, flavors and usual brand, the release said.

An estimated 11.3% (1.72 million) of high school students and an estimated 2.8% (320,000) of middle school students reported current e-cigarette use. Among current users, more than 1 in 4 (27.6%) high school students and about 1 in 12 (8.3%) middle school students who used e-cigarettes used them daily, the release added.

The NYTS survey was administered from January 18 to May 21, 2021 – a period when many students were out of school in remote learning environments that likely affected their access to tobacco products, according to the release.

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Biden Admin. to Prioritize Removing Illegal Immigrants Who Represent Security Threat - DHS

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - US immigration enforcement agencies will prioritize arresting and deporting illegal immigrants considered a risk to national security and public safety while exercising more leniency to undocumented migrants who are contributing members in US communities, Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said in a memorandum on Thursday.

"The fact an individual is a removable noncitizen therefore should not alone be the basis of an enforcement action against them. We will use our discretion and focus our enforcement resources in a more targeted way," Mayorkas said. "By exercising our discretionary authority in a targeted way, we can focus our efforts on those who pose a threat to national security, public safety, and border security and thus threaten America's well-being."

US immigration enforcement will prioritize removing migrants who are suspected of terrorism or espionage activities, pose threat to public safety because of serious criminal conduct, as well as migrants who recently illegally entered the United States.

The new directive will likely protect from arrest and deportation undocumented immigrants who have lived in the United States for years as long as they do not commit serious crimes.

More than 11 million undocumented immigrants live in the United States, a majority whom have been contributing members in US communities nationwide, Mayorkas said.

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US House Passes Bill to Fund Government Through December 3, Sends to Biden for Signature

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives passed a piece of legislation on Thursday that will fund the federal government through December 3, consequently sending the legislation that already passed the Senate to President Joe Biden's desk to sign into law.

The legislation passed the House on a vote of 254 to 175, with 35 Republicans and all Democrats voting in favor.

The Senate passed the legislation to fund the government, dubbed the Extending Government Funding and Delivering Emergency Assistance Act, earlier on Thursday in a vote of 65 to 35.

Congressional Democrats and the Biden administration have been attempting to juggle a time-sensitive legislative agenda that includes funding the government to prevent a shutdown, raising the debt ceiling, and passing a major infrastructure deal.

Attempts to suspend the debt ceiling and prevent a default have been twice halted by Senate Republicans led by Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, despite the House already having voted to suspend it through December 16, 2022.

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US to Sanction Ethiopia Unless 'Clear, Concrete Changes' Take Place - White House

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) – The Biden administration is preparing to impose sanctions on individuals and entities in Ethiopia if no “clear and concrete changes” take place in the country in the realm of the ongoing conflict in the Tigray region, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said Thursday.

“Absent clear and concrete changes, we are preparing to take aggressive action under this executive order to impose targeted sanctions against a range of individuals and entities,” Psaki said when asked why US President Joe Biden resort to imposing sanctions under an executive order from September 17.

Psaki added that the White House wants to see the conflicting parties on the ground in Ethiopia initiate discussion to achieve a negotiated ceasefire and allow humanitarian access within weeks or action will be taken.

On September 17, the US government issued an executive order imposing new sanctions on individuals and organizations involved in the escalating conflict in Ethiopia, but said it will delay imposing them if both sides rapidly act to resolve their dispute.

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Americans' View of Performance at CDC, Other Agencies Plunges During Pandemic - Poll

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - Americans' evaluations of eight prominent federal government agencies have fallen by double digits since 2019, with the largest drop for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a new Gallup poll revealed on Thursday. "Typically, at least six in ten US adults say the CDC is doing an excellent or good job. The current 40% is thus a significant departure from the norm," a press release explaining the poll said.

Just 40 percent of those surveyed had a positive view of the CDC, a 24 percentage point drop from the pre-pandemic year of 2019, the release said.

The decline comes amid criticism of the leading US health agency for frequently changing its messages about the best ways for Americans to protect themselves from the coronavirus, particularly regarding the use of face masks, the release said.

The CDC is not alone in suffering a decline in public trust, with the CIA, the US Postal Service, the Secret Service, the FBI, the IRS, the Department of Homeland Security and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) all showing declines in job ratings of at least 10 percentage points since 2019, the release.

The declines likely reflect the negative effects of the pandemic on Americans' views of society and governance, as well as the recent slide in President Joe Biden's job approval rating, the release added.

The State Department, measured for the first time in the current survey, ranks lowest, of 15 agencies in the poll, with 32% giving it an excellent or good job rating, essentially tied with the EPA (33%), according to the release.

Gallup periodically asks Americans to assess how some of the more newsmaking federal agencies and departments are doing. The latest survey conducted from September 1 to 17 is one of several social polls, each of which surveys a minimum of 1,000 US adults.

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UN Mission's in Libya Reforms Should Take Place After December Election - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, September 30 (Sputnik) - Any decisions regarding possible reforms to the UN Support Mission's in Libya (UNSMIL) mandate should be taken after the general election is held in the country on December 24, Russian Permanent Representative to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said in a Security Council meeting on Thursday.

Earlier in the day, the Security Council unanimously voted to renew the mandate of UNSMIL until January 31, 2022, to support Libya's transitional authorities in the run-up to the upcoming election.

"We agree with the colleagues in the council when they say that the conclusions of the recommendations over the independent strategic review of the mission, including the idea to reform it [and] the leadership of the mission, would be best implemented at the end of the electoral process in the country," Nebenzia said.

The diplomat also called on all Libyan actors to make good use of the Security Council's decision to renew the mission's mandate and with the support of UNMSIL overcome the differences that have accumulated ahead of the December election.

In February, the Swiss-hosted round of intra-Libyan talks resulted in the formation of a new unity government that put an end to a protracted civil war between rival Libyan political factions. The interim authority has replaced two rival administrations until the general election.

Earlier in September, the Libyan High Council of State ratified a constitutional framework for the upcoming general election, as well as a law on elections into the country's national assembly.

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US Court Eases Novatek CFO Gyetvay's Conditions From House Arrest to Curfew - Filing

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - A US federal court has modified Novatek Chief Financial Officer Mark Gyetvay's conditions of release by moving him from house arrest to curfew, a court document revealed on Thursday.

The court document said Gyetvay must be at his residence from 8:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. local time.

Gyetvay is also not allowed to travel beyond Lee and Collier counties in the state of Florida, the court document said.

A separate court document revealed on Thursday that Gyetvay is allowed to transfer cash, but not securities, from his Morgan Stanley account to another account. The court previously said Gyetvay's securities from his Morgan Stanley account will be used for his bond.

On September 23, US authorities arrested Gyetvay on tax evasion charges related to a sum of \$93 million stored in offshore accounts. The Department of Justice said Gyetvay allegedly engaged in a scheme to defraud the United States by concealing his ownership and control over substantial offshore assets and by failing to file and pay taxes on millions of dollars of income. Gyetvay was later released on an \$80 million bond.

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US Strongly Condemns Ethiopia for Expelling Leadership of UN Organizations – White House

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) – The United States condemns Ethiopia for expelling United Nations' humanitarian organizations personnel working in the country and calls upon the Security Council to take urgent action, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said on Thursday. “The US government condemns in the strongest possible terms the government of Ethiopia’s unprecedented action to expel the leadership of all of the United Nations organizations involved in ongoing humanitarian operations,” Psaki said at a press briefing. “We call on the UN Security Council and members of the international community to take urgent action to make clear to the government of Ethiopia that impeding humanitarian operations and depriving your own citizens of the basic means of survival is unacceptable.”

Ethiopia's foreign ministry said the decision to declare the staff from the UNICEF, the UN Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, announced Thursday, was prompted by their meddling in Ethiopia's internal affairs.

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NORTHCOM Chief Says 4,000 Afghans Awaiting Resettlement, 2,600 Resettled Already

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - US Northern Command Chief Gen. Glen VanHerck said during a briefing at the Pentagon on Thursday that roughly 2,600 Afghans have been

resettled so far, while another 4,000 or so have completed the screening processes and currently await relocation.

"There's approximately 4,000 [Afghan evacuees] that are complete with the process pending resettlement at this time, with assurances for relocation... So far, resettled is over 2,600," VanHerck said.

Afghan evacuees are currently being housed at eight US military bases across the country, where they stay while they await more permanent resettlement. Evacuees undergo a series of security and medical screenings prior to relocation, which includes COVID-19 vaccination, according to VanHerck.

VanHerck added that Afghan evacuees will be given housing and support by the US military at the facilities so long as the mission to relocate them continues, which he said could run through the winter months and into the spring.

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UN Security Council Unanimously Votes to Renew Libya's Mission Mandate Until January 31

UNITED NATIONS, September 30 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council on Thursday unanimously supported the renewal of the mandate of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) until January 31, 2022, the President of the Security Council, Irish Ambassador to the United Nations Geraldine Byrne Nason, said following the council's vote.

Through the adoption of the resolution, submitted by the United Kingdom, the Security Council "decides to extend until January 31, 2022, the mandate of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya, as an integrated special political mission to carry out its mandate," the text of the document said.

UNSMIL will therefore continue to support the country's transitional authorities in the run-up to the 2021 general election scheduled to be held in Libya on December 24.

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Afghans to Remain on US Bases for as Long as Relocation Mission Takes - NORTHCOM Chief

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - The US military is prepared to house and assist Afghan evacuees while they await resettlement for as long as the mission to do so takes, Northern Command Chief Gen. Glen VanHerck said during a press briefing at the Pentagon on Thursday.

"We're prepared to be here as long as we need to, to conduct this mission. That's best addressed by [the Department of Homeland Security], the lead federal agency. We stand ready to support. We'll be ready if we need to support through the winter months and into the spring," VanHerck said.

Eight US military bases are currently being used to house roughly 53,000 Afghan evacuees while they go through the security and medical processes required before more permanent resettlement.

There have been approximately 2,600 Afghans resettled in the US so far, with 4,000 others currently complete with the screening processes and awaiting resettlement.

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US Senate Passes Bill to Fund Federal Government Through December 3

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - The US Senate on Thursday passed a bill that will provide funding for the federal government until December 3 to prevent it from shutting down tonight at midnight.

Senators voted 65-35 to pass the US House resolution 5305 dubbed Extending Government Funding and Delivering Emergency Assistance Act.

The bill also includes financial backing for the aftermath of Hurricane Ida and support for thousands of Afghan evacuees who fled their country following the Taliban (banned in Russia) takeover of Afghanistan in mid-August.

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US Should Abolish Debt Ceiling - Treasury Secretary

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - The United States should abolish its debt ceiling to ensure that spending passed in Congress under any administration goes through without a crisis, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said in a congressional testimony on Thursday.

"Yes, I would," Yellen said when asked whether she supports eliminating the US debt limit. "I believe when Congress legislates expenditures and puts in place a tax policy that determines taxes, those are the crucial decisions Congress is making. To finance those spending and tax decisions, it's necessary to issue additional debt."

Yellen added that it was "very destructive to put the president and myself, the Treasury Secretary" in a crisis over the debt ceiling.

Her testimony to the House Committee on Financial Services came as Democrats lawmakers raced to clinch a deal with rival Republicans in the Senate to raise the debt ceiling before midnight on Friday to avoid a government shutdown and potential debt default, which would be the first of its kind for the United States.

The Treasury secretary has cautioned that the United States could run out of money by October 18 without a higher debt ceiling and a default could cause an economic crisis of "enormous proportions."

The impasse over the debt ceiling is primarily due to Republicans' contentions about so-called wasteful spending by the Biden administration. Democrats, meanwhile, argue that the current debt that needs to be paid down was partly accrued during the time of Republican President Donald Trump.

Various economists have suggested that the debt ceiling, which does not measure the country's economic burden, be abolished once and for all to prevent successive governments from being imperiled by the politicization of the inflexible statutory limit.

On a relative point, Yellen said Thursday that the \$28 trillion debt held by the United States was about 105% to US Gross Domestic Product. "That's a number that's higher than we've had during most of the post-war period in the United States, but it's not a number that I think is fiscally irresponsible or unsustainable," she said.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said on Thursday that the Senate could move to consider legislation approved by the House on Wednesday to suspend the US debt ceiling through December 16, 2022, as early as next week.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell also said that Republicans will allow the passage of a temporary funding bill to keep the government open, although the party has indicated that it will not support wider legislation to raise the debt ceiling.

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US, Russian Strategic Talks in Geneva 'Intensive and Substantive' - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - The talks between the Russian and the US delegations held in Geneva on Thursday were intensive and substantive, a joint statement released by the State Department following the US-Russia Strategic Stability Dialogue.

"The discussion was intensive and substantive. The two delegations agreed to form two interagency expert working groups - the Working Group on Principles and Objectives for Future Arms Control, and the Working Group on Capabilities and Actions with Strategic Effects," the statement said.

The delegations also agreed that the two working groups would continue to hold meetings, which would be followed by a third plenary meeting.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov headed the Russian delegation, while the US delegation was headed by Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman.

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US Intelligence Community Still Assessing Claim N.Korea Tested Hypersonic Missile- General
WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - The US intelligence community is still assessing claims from North Korea that it recently tested a hypersonic missile, US Northern Command (NORTHCOM) Commander Gen. Glen VanHerck said on Thursday.

"I understand the intel community is still making an assessment of the North Korean claim to have tested a hypersonic, we'll just have to see that capability," VanHerck said during a press briefing. "Right now it would be my assessment that the homeland would be safe and secure from a hypersonic capability as North Korea claims they have tested."

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Guterres Says 'Shocked' by Ethiopia's Decision to Expel 7 UN Officials

UNITED NATIONS, September 30 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said on Thursday he was shocked to learn about Ethiopia's decision to expel seven UN employees, including senior officials, and the organization is now engaging with Addis Ababa to allow the affected staff to continue their work in the country.

"I was shocked by the information that the government of Ethiopia has declared seven UN officials, including senior UN humanitarian officials, as persona non grata," Guterres said in a statement. "We are now engaging with the government of Ethiopia in the expectation that the concerned UN staff will be allowed to continue their important work."

Ethiopia's foreign ministry said its decision to declare the staff from the UNICEF, the UN Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights, and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs was prompted by their meddling in Ethiopia's internal affairs.

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One Student in Critical Condition After Memphis Elementary School Shooting - Police

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - One male student is in critical condition in the aftermath of the shooting that occurred in the Memphis Elementary School earlier in the day, the Memphis Police said on Thursday.

"At 9:15 am, officers responded to a shooting at 1037 Cummings. Officers located one male juvenile shooting victim who was transported to LeBonheur in critical condition," the police said via Twitter. "Officers are clearing the building. Students and faculty members are being relocated to a staging area."

The police noted that no other injuries have been reported.

The police also said that no one has yet been arrested and the probe into the incident is ongoing as officers are trying to locate a male juvenile suspect.

A media press conference on the incident is expected to take place soon.

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UN Urges Nations to Refrain From Expelling Haitian Migrants Without Assessing Their Needs

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - A group of United Nations agencies are calling on countries to refrain from deporting Haitian migrants in groups without properly assessing their protective needs, the UN Refugee Agency said in a press release on Thursday.

"The UN Refugee Agency, the International Organization for Migration, the United Nations Children's Fund and the UN Human Rights Office call on states to refrain from expelling Haitians without proper assessment of their individual protection needs, to uphold the fundamental human rights of Haitians on the move, and to offer protection mechanisms or other legal stay arrangements for more effective access to regular migration pathways," the release said.

The UN Refugee Agency also said deporting migrants in groups without examining each case individually to identify protection needs violates international human rights and refugee law.

The UN Refugee Agency said the situation is expected to worsen as a result of the earthquake that struck Haiti on August 14, which strains any capacity to receive returning Haitians.

Countries in the Americas must develop a comprehensive regional approach to ensure Haitian migrants are protected as they move throughout the region, the release said. Countries must address protection needs of Haitian children migrating alone, and Haitian migrants who may be victims of trafficking or gender-based violence, the release added.

Haiti suffered a devastating earthquake in August in which more than 2,000 people died in addition to suffering poverty, rampant gang violence and a political crisis following the assassination of previous President Jovenel Moise on July 7.

Some 15,000 migrants, mostly from Haiti, arrived in Del Rio, Texas, earlier this month prompting Texas to declare a state of emergency and deploy additional state police officers and National Guard troops to stem the surge. The United States to date conducted 17 flights to Haiti to transport about 2,000 individuals who tried to cross the southern border of the United States.

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Schumer Says Senate Could Consider House Legislation to Raise US Debt Ceiling Next Week

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said on Thursday that the Senate could move to consider legislation approved by the House on Wednesday to suspend the US debt ceiling through December 16, 2022 as early as next week.

"Yesterday, the House approved legislation providing for a clean debt limit extension until the end of 2022. At the appropriate time, I'll move to proceed to its consideration, which could come as early as next week," Schumer said during remarks on the Senate floor.

The House legislation to raise the debt ceiling passed on Wednesday in a vote of 219-212 that fell mostly along partisan lines. The legislation is expected to face greater challenges in the Senate, however, given the higher 60-vote threshold normally needed to raise the debt ceiling.

The US could default on its debt by October 18 according to US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, who warned Congress on Tuesday that failing to raise the debt ceiling could cause an economic crisis of "enormous proportions."

In addition to the issue of raising the debt ceiling to avoid a default, the Congress has also been working hastily to pass a bill that funds the government and avoids a shutdown. Senate Minority

Leader Mitch McConnell said on Thursday that Republicans will allow a funding bill to pass. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in response said that the House is ready to pass it as well.

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US Military Suicide Rate Not Affected By COVID-19, Yet Increased From 2015 - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - The coronavirus pandemic has not impacted the suicide rate in the US military, but the rate nevertheless increased from 2015 to 2020, the Defense Department said in a statement upon issuing its Annual Suicide Report on Thursday. The Defense Department said at least 580 service members committed suicide - a number that shows an increase from 2015 to 2020. In the near-term, the 2020 suicide rate was statistically comparable to that in 2019 and 2018, the statement said.

"While suicide rates are not going in the desired direction, the Department did not see a statistical change in suicide rates between CY 2020 and CY 2019 or CY 2018 that would indicate a COVID-19-related increase. We recognize the impact of COVID-19 on the well-being of our force and our Nation," the statement said.

Defense Department Suicide Prevention Office Director Karin Orvis said suicide still remains a serious public health issue in the US military and in the United States.

"Our efforts must address the many aspects of life that impact suicide. The Department is engaged in implementing a comprehensive public health approach to suicide prevention and is providing tailored resources to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic," Orvis said.

The Defense Department continues to collaborate with federal and non-federal partners to alter the conversation around mental health and suicide, she added.

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UN Urges Nations to Refrain From Expelling Haitian Migrants Without Assessing Their Needs

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - A group of United Nations agencies are calling on countries to refrain from deporting Haitian migrants in groups without properly assessing their protective needs, the UN Refugee Agency said in a press release on Thursday.

"The UN Refugee Agency, the International Organization for Migration, the United Nations Children's Fund and the UN Human Rights Office call on states to refrain from expelling Haitians without proper assessment of their individual protection needs, to uphold the fundamental human rights of Haitians on the move, and to offer protection mechanisms or other legal stay arrangements for more effective access to regular migration pathways," the release said.

The UN Refugee Agency also said deporting migrants in groups without examining each case individually to identify protection needs violates international human rights and refugee law.

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US Should Abolish Debt Ceiling - Treasury Secretary

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - The United States should abolish its debt ceiling to ensure that spending passed in Congress under any administration goes through without a crisis, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said in a congressional testimony on Thursday. "Yes, I would," Yellen said when asked whether she supports eliminating the US debt limit. "I believe when Congress legislates expenditures and puts in place a tax policy that determines taxes, those are the crucial decisions Congress is making. To finance those spending and tax decisions, it's necessary to issue additional debt." Yellen added that it was "very destructive to put the president and myself, the Treasury Secretary" in a crisis over the debt ceiling.

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US House to Vote on Bill to Avert Gov't Shutdown Thursday After Senate Passes It - Pelosi

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - The US House of Representatives will vote on legislation to avert a government shutdown later on Thursday after the Senate passes the bill, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said. "A little bit later this morning, the Senate will be voting on a continuing resolution [bill] which they will send back to the House, which we will pass and send on to the president to keep the government open," Pelosi said during a press conference on Thursday. The House passed the measure on Wednesday and advanced it to the Senate, but another vote is needed to approve any changes made to the bill in the upper chamber. This bill will temporarily keep the government funded through December 3 to avert a government shutdown tonight at midnight.

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US Senate Will Pass Government Funding Bill on Thursday – Republican Minority Leader

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) – The US Senate will pass a bill to allow funding of the federal government through December 3 to avert possible shutdown, Republican minority leader Mitch McConnell said on Thursday. "The Democratic majority has begun to realize that the way forward on basic governing duties matches the roadmap that Republicans have been laying out for months on government funding

that Republicans laid out all along with a clean continuing resolution without the poison pill of a debt limit increase. That's exactly what will pass today," McConnell said during his remarks on the Senate floor.

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US Charges 2 Executives With Defrauding COVID-19 Relief Program of Nearly \$3Mln

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - A federal grand jury indicted two executives of a trucking firm with fraudulently obtaining \$2.8 million from a COVID-19-related relief program to help small business weather the pandemic, the US Justice Department said on Thursday. "The indictment charges Chris Carroll and George Reed with 3 counts of bank fraud and 6 counts of money laundering in connection with their company Square One Group's receipt of two fraudulent Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans, one in the amount of more than \$1.2 million, and the second loan in the amount of more than \$1.6 million," the Justice Department said in a press release.

The indictment alleges that Reed and Carroll submitted PPP loan applications in their spouses' names, rather than their own names, to misrepresent and conceal Carroll's status as a paroled felon, which would have precluded his company from receiving PPP funds, the release said. It is further alleged, that Carroll and Reed did not use the funds to compensate their employees, and used the loans to pay themselves \$660,000 while suspending employee pay and health insurance coverage, the release added.

PPP loans are converted to grants when the money is used to pay employee wages and to continue providing benefits, including those for workers furloughed due to the pandemic.

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Two Former Correctional Officers Charged with Smuggling Drugs into US Prison - DOJ

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - Two former correctional officers at a US prison have been charged with smuggling drugs and other banned items into the facility at which they worked, the Justice Department said on Thursday in a press release.

"As part of the Justice Department's continuing efforts against prison corruption, a federal grand jury in the District of Kansas returned two indictments on Sept. 22 charging two former correctional officers with smuggling drugs and other contraband into Leavenworth Detention Center," the Justice Department said.

The indictment alleges that the first defendant, Jacqueline Sifuentes, used her position as a prison guard to smuggle contraband including methamphetamine, marijuana and tobacco into the facility in exchange for bribes from the inmates, the Justice Department said.

The second defendant, Cheyonte Harris, is similarly charged with using her position as a prison guard to smuggle contraband into the facility, although the Justice Department did not specify what sort.

If convicted on all counts, Sifuentes could face up to 40 years in prison, while Harris could face up to 10.

The Justice Department added that these cases are part of their ongoing efforts to combat prison corruption. The FBI recently obtained convictions against three former North Carolina prison officials who similarly smuggled contraband into the facility for bribes.

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Blinken, Malaysian Counterpart Discuss Ways to Tackle Growing Myanmar Crisis – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken discussed the worsening crisis in Myanmar in a telephone conversation with Malaysian Foreign Minister Saifuddin Abdullah, Department of State Spokesperson Ned Price said on Thursday.

“Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke by phone today with Malaysian Foreign Minister Saifuddin Abdullah,” Price said in a readout. “The Secretary and the Foreign Minister discussed... efforts to address the worsening crisis in Burma (Myanmar).”

Blinken and Abdullah also discussed the close US-Malaysia partnership, the importance of upholding the international rules-based order and peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region, Price added.

Myanmar's government in exile, the National Unity Government (NUG) called earlier this month for a groundswell of resistance and nationwide protests against the country's military government, setting out a strategy for achieving the highly challenging objectives.

However, also in September, Russian Deputy Defense Minister Alexander Fomin and vice chairman of Myanmar's State Administration Council Soe Win agreed at a meeting in Moscow to strengthen the military-technical cooperation between their states.

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US Tests New Domain Awareness Systems For Airspace Along Canadian Border - DHS

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) – The US is evaluating cutting-edge air domain awareness technologies to protect the airspace along the nation's northern border with Canada, the department's Science and Technology (S&T) Directorate said on Thursday.

“Working with U.S. Customs and Border Protection, the U.S. Coast Guard, the Department of Defense, and the Federal Aviation Administration to develop requirements and testing criteria, S&T's National Urban Security Technology Laboratory led a test team that also included the

Montana National Guard, Northern Plains UAS Test Site, and MITRE,” the DHS said in a press release.

The team of government and industry partners recently completed a three-week demonstration of air domain awareness systems in the state of Montana, which borders Canada, the release said.

The tests examined radar, infra-red and optical cameras, radio frequency detectors and acoustic devices to determine how each can monitor the border, the release added.

The assessments in the mountainous terrain of Montana follow earlier air domain awareness evaluations that took place in the plains of the state of North Dakota, according to the release.

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Global Air Travel Recovery Weakening as Delta Variant Surges - IATA

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) - The global recovery in air travel weakened in August as governments around the world reacted to the surge in coronavirus Delta variant cases by imposing new restrictions, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) said on Thursday.

“IATA announced that the recovery in air travel decelerated in August compared to July, as government actions in response to concerns over the COVID-19 Delta variant cut deeply into domestic travel demand,” the Geneva-based organization said in a press release.

Total demand for air travel in August 2021 measured in revenue passenger kilometers, or RPKs, was down 56% compared to August 2019 indicating a slowdown from July when demand was 53% below July 2019 levels, IATA said.

“August results reflect the impact of concerns over the Delta variant on domestic travel, even as international travel continued on a snail’s pace toward a full recovery that cannot happen until governments restore the freedom to travel, IATA added.

The slowdown in recovery was entirely driven by domestic markets, which were down 32.2% compared to August 2019, a major deterioration from the previous month of July. The worst impact was in China, while India and Russia were the only large markets to show an improvement over July, according to IATA.

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Northrup Grumman Begins 'Low Rate' Production of Upgraded Anti-Radiation Missile

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) – The US Navy has awarded a contract to launch initial low-rate production (LRIP) of an extended-range version of the Anti-Radiation Guided Missile (AARGM-ER), Northrop Grumman said on Thursday.

“LRIP marks a significant step forward for AARGM-ER and the confidence the U.S. Navy has in the program and its capabilities,” said Captain Alex Dutko, Navy Program Manager for Direct

Time Sensitive Strike. "AARGM-ER will provide the U.S. Navy and our allies with unmatched protection."

The extended range enhancement is a significant upgrade to the currently produced and fielded anti-radiation missile in the Navy's arsenal, the defense contractor added.

The AARGM-ER is currently being integrated on the Navy F/A-18E/F Super Hornet and EA-18G Growler aircraft as well as the Air Force F-35A, Marine Corps F-35B, and Navy F-35C aircraft, the release said.

The AARGM-ER incorporates hardware and software modifications to improve capabilities of existing versions of the supersonic air-launched guided missile, which is designed to operate in contested environments degraded by electromagnetic radiation, according to the Navy.

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State Dept Says WHO Vaccine Approval Important to Allow Jabbed Foreigners Entrance to US

WASHINGTON, September 30 (Sputnik) – The authorization of COVID-19 vaccines by the World Health Organization (WHO) will be an important factor to the US in their decision to allow immunized foreigners to enter the country, State Department Coordinator for Global COVID-19 Response Gayle Smith said on Thursday.

"I think that WHO authorization has been a very important factor for us," Smith told reporters during a virtual press briefing, when asked if the US will allow people vaccinated with Russia's Sputnik V to enter the country if WHO will authorize it.

The United States considers such an authorization not as a judgment on any vaccine, but as a way to determine its safety, Smith added.

Starting from November, all foreigners visiting the United States will have to provide proof of immunization for the novel coronavirus with vaccines approved by the US Food Drug Administration or by WHO.

In mid-September, WHO suspended the emergency use authorization (EUA) process for the Sputnik V vaccine. Russia's trade ministry told Sputnik that WHO inspectors had criticized the site for its environmental impact, including the lack of emissions monitoring. The vaccine has been approved for use in 70 countries with a combined population of 4 billion.